

THE D'ANTONI HOUSE
7929 Freret Street

Architectural Rating: Blue
Date of Construction: 1919
Architect: Edward Sporn

Nomination Information

Date: July 14, 1983
Nominated by: Camille Strachan
Seconded by: Joanne Whitley, Chris Friedrichs
Recommended by: Staff

Site Description

Square 121, Lots 1,2,3,4,5,6,22, and part 7
7th Municipal District; 16th Assessment District
Zoning: RD-2

Lot Size: 155 front on Freret approximately; 192 front on Short approximately;
180 feet along line nearest Fern approximately; property line nearest
Zimble, beginning at point on line nearest Fern, measures 93 feet
moving toward Short, turns at right angle 12 feet toward Zimble, then
turns at right angle 62 feet to property line along Short.

Owner: Rosina D'Antoni

The nomination of this property was based upon the building's architectural significance. Each of the four criteria used in determining landmark qualification, as outlined in Ordinance No. 5992 M.C.S., will be examined on an individual basis in order to produce information upon which a final decision whether or not to designate this property will be made.

Architectural Significance

The land upon which the D'Antoni House is located was assembled by Salvatore D'Antoni in three separate acts of sale. Two of these acts occurred on October 28, 1916, and involved the sale of lots 1,2,3,4 and 22, and a greater portion of 5, by Henry P. Dart, Sr. to D'Antoni; and the sale of lot 6 and the residual of lot 5, by Victor Bock and Henriette Bock to D'Antoni. These acts of sale are recorded in Conveyance Office Books 286/506 and 284/485, respectively. The remainder of the property was acquired on March 22, 1918 from Victor and Henriette Bock, being the portion of lot 7 measuring 12 feet front on Short Street by a depth between parallel lines of 62 feet. This sale is recorded in COB 298/351. Data from the Tax Assessment Rolls for the year 1918-1919 indicates that the house was constructed at that time.

The D'Antoni House was designed by local architect Edward Sporn, and reflects an unusual combining of the principles of Prairie architecture primarily attributed to noted American architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1869-1959) with the stylistic and formal aspects of the Italian Renaissance Style, both of which, according to A Field Guide to American Houses, by Virginia and Lee McAlister, fall into the general category of Eclectic architecture.

The Prialre house was developed around the turn of the century in the Chicago area, and is today, as it was then, largely associated with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright.

THE D'ANTONI HOUSE
7929 Freret Street
p.2

Two basic reactions against the so-called "surface styles" of the late Victorian period were evident at the turn of the century. One was the resurgence of interest in classical architecture, reflected in the various Neoclassical works of architects such as McKim, Mead & White and Richard M. Hunt. The other was the architecture of Louis Sullivan, according to Mary M. Foley in The American House, the "champion of the indigenous American architecture which had been developing within the mixed Victorian scene." It was under the latter that Frank Lloyd Wright received his early training, and his Prairie architecture, taking its name from the environment in which it was given shape, was, in the early stages, characterized by a formality which paralleled yet contrasted that of Neoclassical architecture. As stated by Leland Roth in A Concise History of American Architecture, "Wright's sources were classic, romantic, exotic, eclectic to a high degree, but his goal was an ordered unity which eventually made Queen Anne and Shingle Style houses...seem like ill-digested aggregations. Thus, in many ways, Wright's search for a more ordered, coherent, integrated architecture paralleled that of the more traditional neoclassicists. Wright, however, set about creating his own language."

One of the most notable traits of Prairie houses is an emphasis on horizontality, achieved through the use of wide eaves, projecting terraces, contrasting copings, and other architectural devices. Wright felt that by extending the horizontal planes of the house, it would appear more integrated with its surroundings, one of the important principles of what Wright was to term "organic architecture". Other recognizable and characteristic aspects of the Prairie house include an eschewal of the historically-derived detail, such as column orders and entablatures, found in the Neoclassical tradition. Visual interest was created through the exploitation of natural colors and textures of materials; ornament, where used, was generally based on organic or geometric motifs. Typical materials of Prairie houses included stucco with contrasting wood trim, horizontal batten siding, and narrow Roman brick, materials which could be used to emphasize horizontality. In lieu of the traditional opening punched out of a wall, windows were often arranged in groups, creating banks of openings. Finally, it should be noted that in Wright's finest Prairie houses, such as the Robie House (1906), the elements of the style had crystallized to such an extent, and the horizontality emphasized to such a degree, that the design transcends the abstraction of traditional house forms seen in Wright's earlier Prairie houses.

Although Wright drew many adherents to his Prairie architecture, some of whom were quite adept at designing Prairie houses of their own, the movement, based as it was upon the talents and visions of one particular person, was one of the briefest in the history of American architecture. By the end of World War I, the Prairie Style had declined in popularity, displaced in part by the European International Style which, ironically enough, it had played a role in creating. In the short span of its popularity, it had an effect upon American domestic architecture, capsulized in A Field Guide to American Houses: "Outside the Chicago area, numerous local architects produced creditable and sometimes outstanding Prairie houses throughout the midwestern states and, less commonly, in other regions. The style, in its vernacular form, was spread throughout the country by pattern books published in the Midwest." The vernacular examples, including those found in early 20th century

THE D'ANTONI HOUSE
7929 Freret Street
p.3

neighborhoods of New Orleans, are mainly "builder's versions" of the earliest and, by far, the simplest of the Prairie house forms, the Prairie Box or American Foursquare. These are two-story structures with square or rectangular plans, featuring hipped roofs and one-story porches. By contrast, the D'Antoni House displays a degree of complexity which suggests that its architect was not only inspired by Wright's works, but adept at his architectural vocabulary. Furthermore, the D'Antoni House represents not a mere replica of a Wrightian Prairie house, but a synthesis of characteristics of the Italian Renaissance Style (of the Neoclassical tradition) with elements of the Prairie Style and the Craftsman Style.

The two-story house of buff-colored Roman brick consists of a basement level, entered through the Short Street elevation, and a main floor, reached by a stone walk interrupted by several short flights leading to the Freret Street facade. From Freret Street, the house appears to be raised on a light-colored stone base, with the lower portion of the building's masonry walls interrupted by a course of the same light-colored stone which encircles virtually the entire building. Above this, the walls of the main level, recessed slightly behind the plane of the lower walls, rise to a parapet, interrupted above the windows by a slab-like overhang whose edge is embellished with a pattern of a geometric nature. This element is interesting in that it fulfills the Prairie house principle of extending the horizontal planes of a building in order to integrate it with its site, yet it is not an element typically seen on Wright's Prairie houses. If the D'Antoni House is considered as an exaggerated Italian Renaissance form, the overhang may have been derived from the prominent cornices of flat-roofed Italian Renaissance Style buildings, which were typically, as in the D'Antoni House, topped with a parapet wall or balustrade.

The elements of the principle facade are arranged in a symmetrical manner, and, in this respect, make strong references to the Italian Renaissance Style as the source of the building's form, particularly in the use of projecting wings. These wings, featuring triple-grouped windows, flank the entrance porch, whose array of elements include a striking Craftsman-style portico of interlocking rafters and beams, with a symmetrical arrangement of door and windows similar to that seen on Wright's Winslow House (1893-94), considered his first Prairie house, and, according to Roth, "a flirtation with classical formality". Yet, while the placements may be classical in nature, the details of the patterned, stone frame are not, and exhibit the type of ornament derived from geometric or organic forms popular in the Prairie style. The portico is the most powerful element of the building, and the exotic appearance of the superstructure of rafters and beams which appears to float above the flaring capitals of the octagonal free-standing and semi-octagonal, engaged columns contrasts, yet complements, the formal aspect of the building itself. It is not inconceivable that this Craftsman-style portico is, in essence, a translation of the classically-detailed entrance porch of the Italian Renaissance-style house into a distinctly non-classical architectural language.

The Short Street elevation is based upon another type of Italian Renaissance form, that of the entrance facade with projecting central wing, as opposed to the Freret Street facade, which is based upon the entrance facade with flanking projecting wings. On the Short Street elevation, the slab-like overhang is inter-

THE D'ANTONI HOUSE
7929 Freret Street
p.4

interrupted by the central, projecting portion of the wall. The entrance into the basement level of the house is located on this shallow wing, and features a frame of intricately-patterned stone. Above the entrance is a metal and glass canopy whose leading edge presents a row of formidable spikes. In contrast to the symmetrical aspects of the Freret Street and Short Street elevations, the Fern Street elevation is considerably more asymmetric, and includes, among its notable features, a projecting wing with curious, double overhang, and a large, segmental arch opening leading onto a low balcony supported by stone brackets.

Two aspects of the site bear mention with regard to the architectural significance of this house. First, located to the rear of the main building and near the Short Street property line is a small accessory building whose design is based upon that of the main building: the relationship of overhang, exposed rafters, contrasting stone bands and copings, and basic massing of the main building are all echoed in this accessory structure. Second, the Freret Street and Short Street property lines are delineated by a low, iron fence on a masonry base. This iron fence features elaborate gate posts of open, geometric tracery, and the gates and flanking sections of fence are executed in a curving design which calls to mind both Oriental and Art Nouveau influences. The detached garage and the fence lend additional significance to the property, and should be considered in the determination of landmark eligibility.

The D'Antoni House represents an unusual example of domestic architecture dating from the early 20th century, and reflects the influence of two somewhat opposing schools of design, the Italian Renaissance Style of the Neoclassical tradition and the Prairie Style and Craftsman Style of the earliest Modern tradition. The successful synthesis of these two early 20th century approaches to architectural design reflected in the D'Antoni House makes this structure a noteworthy example of Eclectic architecture, invaluable for the study of the development of American architecture.

Noted Architects

The architect of the D'Antoni House was Edward Sporl, a local architect also responsible for the Prairie Style building located at 6 Newcomb Boulevard. At this time, little is known of Sporl's career or works, but the D'Antoni House strongly suggests his competence as an architect. Further research may provide additional information on Sporl's works.

Historic Personages or Events

There are no historical personages or events associated with this house which would lend it additional significance.

Cultural, Social, Economic or Political Significance

None

Recommendation: For designation, based upon architectural significance.